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A

LETTER

TO

Mr. GEORGE MAXWELL,

FROM

The Rev. JAMES ASHLEY,

RECTOR OF FLEET.

THE SECOND EDITION.

"I have written with reluctance, but not without extreme provocation.—A man, to whom I had given no kind of offence, declared open war against me.—Attacked as I was unprovokedly, and abused most illiberally; not to feel, would be Stupidity, and not to answer, Cowardice."

"SIEPSUM DESERERE TURPISSIMUM EST."

Wisbech:

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To be had GRATIS of the Printer; the Rectory at Fleet; and the King's Head in Spalding.



To Mr. GEORGE MAXWELL.

IT is probable you may not expect to hear from me at present; nor should I have paid my respects to you so soon, but for a circumstance I shall mention presently. I had, indeed, promised to give a History of your conduct* as a Commissioner in the South Holland Drainage, and the Fleet Inclosure Bills; and I will most carefully keep my promise; but I always intended, and still do intend, to postpone that, 'till the measure of your misconduct in those businesses is full; the History of it shall then be complete.

* In animadverting upon the conduct of the Commissioners, I wish to be considered as confining myself almost exclusively to Mr. Maxwell, as he appears to be their perpetual dictator. The two Gentlemen joined with him I have but little to object against; though I cannot help thinking them blameable for committing themselves to the management of a man so proud so arbitrary, and overbearing. If this supineness has betrayed either or both of them into very unpleasant predicaments, I need not remind them of it. If it has not, I have been very much misinformed, as well as mistaken.

A former publication, that seems to have given you much umbrage, was occasioned by your illiberal, and unprovoked *print'd* attack upon the very title to part of my estate, with which you had *no sort of business or concern, either officially or otherwise.* For the present address, you are indebted to the volume of low abuse you was pleased to honor me with at a late public meeting at Spalding. If I had been disposed to have retorted your scurribilities, the confusion and irregularity which prevailed in the room, would have made it impossible. I was far from entertaining any such wish or inclination; at the same time, I was equally far from intending they should pass unnoticed.

Abuse is so notoriously your general mode of answering, that I should have been much disappointed if you had acted differently; and as this happy talent of your's has been exerted with singular effect upon characters so truly estimable as Mr. Wing, the Rev. Mr. Devie, the late Rev. Mr. R. O. the late Mr. H. and many other very worthy men, I should have been mortified if you had not added my name to so respectable a list*. For this distinction

* In some *very liberal letters* which Mr. Maxwell thought proper to print and publish, addressed to John Wing, Esq. and others; amidst a profusion of flowers equally fragrant, I shall at present select only the following *elegant bouquet.*

Mr. Wing, a truly respectable character, is very wittily called Mr. Leg, and insulted through the whole correspondence with most gross and wanton abuse.

A faithful honest old assistant on the Bedford estate, whose name happened, luckily for Mr. Maxwell's punning propensity, to be Payne, is, with equal ingenuity, nicknamed Mr. TROUBLE, and charged with the terrible crime of drinking brandy!

distinction I thank you; and can truly assure you, that I shall always consider myself honored by the abuse of such men as Mr. Maxwell.

It may perhaps be asked, if instead of railing and abusing, it would not have been as well to answer, and confute? But such fastidious enquirers should recollect, that to rail is extremely easy—to answer, more than difficult—and to confute, perhaps impossible.

You, Sir, without any just cause, seem to have lost your temper; I have not lost mine, though smarting under injuries, from your malice as well as your misconduct, which require all the mildness of humanity to

The Rev. Mr. R. O. who lately paid the debt of nature, "full of years, and full of honour," who lived generally beloved and respected as a clergyman and a magistrate, and died universally deplored and lamented as a gentleman and a Christian. This very excellent man is treated by Mr. Maxwell, in language so grossly scurrilous, and even so offensively filthy, that it is impossible to copy it, without insulting common decency, and disgracing the press, as the original has already done.

"None but a MAXWELL should a MAXWELL quote."

The Rev. Mr. Devie, another ancient and venerable clergyman and magistrate, and as respectable a man as any in existence, after being most wittily called an old woman, and abused in words too gross to repeat, is most politely reminded how very near his name (*Devie*) is to the word *devil*, with an observation that is too shocking even to hint at. Surely the insinuation of so despicable, not to say *diabolical* a pun, never disgraced the garrets of Grub-Street! Such however is Mr. Maxwell's wit! Such is Mr. Maxwell's *liberality*! Such are Mr. Maxwell's *arguments*?—And yet, this is the man who complains of being treated with too little ceremony, in a publication where his name, so far from being punned upon, or quibbled with, is not even mentioned.

forget,

forget, and all the meekness of christianity to forgive. Difficult as the task might have been, if you had satisfied yourself with *injuring* only, I should have endeavoured to suffer in silence; but when to private, as well as public injuries, you add also private and public insults, it becomes impossible, and would be disgraceful to the spirit of a man, to let them pass unnoticed. The meek spirit of christianity does indeed inculcate the excellent doctrine of forgiving injuries; but it does not prohibit the necessary attention to repel the insulting arrogance of petulance, pride, and malevolence. Permit me therefore calmly to assure you, that your abuse is harmless and inane; and your anger you should reserve for future occasions, which may better seem to warrant what nothing, in fact, can either warrant or justify; in the mean time, let it not keep you still blind, as you always have been to the truth contained in the short maxim of a celebrated French writer—“*Abuser, n'est pas à répondre.*”—**ABUSING IS NOT ANSWERING!**

You was pleased to say, that “I have published a thousand falsities.”—Indeed! Then are you strangely kind and indulgent to falsities! Surely, much more so than a good man ought to be; for you have suffered more than eighteen months to elapse, without either confuting, or even pointing out one of the thousand. If falsities, they could do you no injury, nor me any credit;—just the contrary. Why then this anger and anxiety about what, if false, would not deserve a thought? “A thousand ‘falsities’ would long since have confuted themselves; and yet I have never heard of any one but yourself, that pretended

pretended to entertain the least shadow of a doubt, about the truth of any thing contained in the publication; that seems to have given you so much offence. I never did, nor ever will publish any thing but what I know to be true, or have the best grounded reason to think so, beyond the possibility of doubting: and I challenge you to disprove ONE of the "thousand falsities" you so confidently charge me with. The man that brands me with falsehood, must be a stranger to truth himself. You yourself know the charge to be unsounded; and that it proves nothing but your total ignorance of my character. Falshood, Sir, does not, nor ever did, form any part of that character;—for this I can safely and proudly appeal to all those who really know me; they are fully competent to repel the calumny, and contemn the calumniator.

Before I proceed to notice your scurribilities more particularly, I will bestow a few minutes in explaining what occasioned them; that it may appear whether abuse and illiberality, always out of time, was a whit better timed in this case than in others.

At the meeting above alluded to, a clause in the Fleet Inclosure Act was mentioned, which, amongst much other extraneous matter, is very foreign to the subject of that Bill. I had occasion to observe, that if the South Holland Drainage Commissioners had done their duty, that clause would have been unnecessary. Without being suffered to explain my meaning, I was immediately assailed with a torrent of illiberal and personal

personal abuse, disgraceful to any place, but particularly so to a meeting of gentlemen, convened to transact public business. The meaning which I was not then permitted to explain, I shall now take the liberty of stating shortly; that it may appear whether the above declaration contained any thing false or unfounded, so as to justify a conduct so uncourteous and ungentle.

The object of the South Holland Drainage Bill, is to drain and improve sundry low lands of a certain description; and it contains a clause, empowering the Commissioners to extend the benefit of that Drainage to certain high lands also, " provided two-thirds in Value, of the Proprietors of such high Lands, in each Parish, should petition the Commissioners for that purpose, at any of their Meetings to be held before the 29th of September 1793." The several parishes which intended petitioning, prepared their petitions accordingly, ready to deliver; and a meeting was held at Holbech for the purpose of receiving such petitions, on the 22d of September 1793. When, instead of receiving them, the Commissioners thought proper to adjourn that meeting to the 28th of the same month, the very last day on which they could be received, under the pretence of allowing more time for preparing the petitions.

As the petitions were all ready to deliver, and I believe not a single signature has been added to them since; it is difficult to conceive why the Commissioners, instead of receiving them then, thought it best to adjourn the meeting. But, without enquiring, I will suppose their

their reasons to be good and cogent. Let us see what was done at the adjourned meeting:—Mr. Walker, one of the Commissioners, and Mr. Saunderson, their Solicitor, with his Clerk, duly attended. But, although you had been at Holbech the evening before, and were then at Spalding, only eight miles off, instead of meeting them, you wrote a letter to Mr. Walker, informing him, “That Mr. Hare was detained at home by a domestic misfortune, and therefore, as no business could be done, you should not attend; and directed “Mr. Walker to adjourn to the 4th of November.” By this, your non-attendance, the power of receiving the petitions was lost for ever.

The clause in the act which appoints the three Commissioners, afterwards goes on in these words—“And any two of the said Commissioners, are hereby fully authorised and empowered to act, execute, do, and perform, all and every or any Matter, or Thing, required and necessary to be done, and performed, by and in pursuance of this Act, as fully and effectually, to all Intents and Purposes, as if all the said Commissioners hereinbefore appointed were present at, and executed, did, and performed the same.” Will it be said, that you did not know of, or did not understand this part of the clause? That would be ignorance too gross for Mr. Maxwell. Will you, therefore, condescend to inform the petitioners, thus a second time disappointed, for what other reason you neglected to attend the meeting, and so deprived them for ever of any advantage

under the Act: but by a fresh application to Parliament, which it accordingly became necessary to make?

The Fleet Inclosure Bill soon after went into Parliament, and they were obliged to avail themselves of that opportunity to renew the powers your neglect had suffered to lapse; and, accordingly, a clause for this purpose was crowded into that Bill, with much other matter very foreign to the subject of the Fleet Inclosure.

Is there a man existing who will think I went too far in saying, that "if the Commissioners had done their duty, that clause would have been unnecessary?" Perhaps, indeed, I should only have said—if Mr. Maxwell had done his duty? Mr. Walker, one of the Commissioners, did his duty by attending. Mr. Hare, the other Commissioner, had a reasonable excuse for his non-attendance. But you, shewing no proper attention to the business, assigned no other reason for your neglect, than Mr. Hare's unavoidable absence, which certainly made your presence the more necessary, as you could not but know, that Mr. Walker and you would have formed a quorum, fully competent to the business of the day, which your negligence lost, and which could never afterwards be resumed.

If the business of the day had been any thing in the common routine of commissionering, any thing that might be done to-day, to-morrow, or twelve months hence—

or,

or, in other words, any matter that would bear a dozen adjournments, and at last to be done *a la Commissionnaire*; in such a case, I say, much allowance might be made for a GREAT MAN's whims and caprices. But as that was the last day for transacting it, as it must be done that day or not at all, as it would not admit of any further adjournments; but, if neglected then, the very power of doing it was lost for ever. At such a moment to be whimsical, and suffer your caprice to supersede your duty, was most unaccountable, and, I think, almost unpardonable.

It may not be unpleasant to enquire, what was the mighty business that required, as unavoidably necessary, the attendance of all the three Commissioners? If these three great men, with their clerk, and their clerk's clerk had assembled, they would have received from the hands of persons, ready to deliver them, ten or twelve, we will say, perhaps twenty papers folded up, which the clerk's clerk would have put together and wrapped round with red tape! This is all I think they could have had to do! For you will not yourself pretend to say, that any one of those petitions would have been taken into consideration, or even looked into on that day; yet, according to your ideas, this mighty business rendered indispensably necessary the attendance of all the three Commissioners, at two guineas a day each; with their clerk, and his clerk, at a fee, I hope, not less liberal and handsome.

I have before said, and I say again, that such meetings as these have been wantonly multiplied, particularly in the Fleet Inclosure, beyond what the Act either requires or justifies. This is evident from the plainest construction of the very words of the Act itself; so clear, that I defy ignorance itself to misconstrue, or chicanery to misrepresent, the obvious meaning both of the spirit and letter of it. When it is considered that these curious meetings cost the public nearly, if not quite, ~~TEN POUNDS~~ each, they need not be informed, nor do they want informing, for they know it already, that when the Commissioners and other expenses are paid, little indeed will remain for the Proprietors; and that little is constantly made less and less, by the shameful manner in which the business is protracted from day to day—from month to month—and from year to year. For the Fleet Inclosure Bill passed into a law May 23d, 1794; but, though many meetings like the above have been held, the Common still remains, and is likely to remain exactly in the same state it was in before an inclosure was thought of.

Before I quit this subject, I will take the liberty to observe, that it is peculiar to the South Holland Drainage, and the Fleet Inclosure Acts, for all the Commissioners to attend at every meeting, I believe I am right in saying, that in both cases, and I speak with confidence, as to the Fleet Inclosure, there has not been one meeting held, without all the Commissioners attending. I am not so fastidious as to object to their all attending, if it be convenient; but, as two are competent

competent in all cases, I cannot admit the propriety or expediency of adjourning a meeting (the business of which *could not be postponed*) merely because all three could not conveniently attend; or rather because *one* of them could not, and another *would* not attend. Neither does custom sanction the practice, or justify the necessity of it; on the contrary, it is very common in other businesses of the same description, for meetings to be held by two Commissioners. If we reason from analogy, it will be found that I am far from saying too much, when I state, that all the Commissioners attending every meeting is not necessary. Let us advert to a case as similar as possible—I mean that of commissions of bankruptcy. There, five Commissioners are appointed, and three are competent to act. No man ever heard of more than three Commissioners sitting at a meeting; and if four or five should think proper to act at once, and subject the estate to a needless expense, I am convinced the Lord Chancellor would not only censure them for their conduct, but would strike their names out of the lists of Commissioners.

It is nothing novel for you in your capacity of a Commissioner for Inclosures, &c. to set at defiance the Act which creates both your office and its power. In the present case, the legislature positively says, two Commissioners shall be competent. You are pleased to hold a different language; and, like the ghost in Gay's farce, confidently exclaim—“*All three! All THREE!! ALL THREE!!!*”

But

But it is time to return to your polite conversation at the meeting at Spalding. In language peculiarly your own, you was pleased to promise (perhaps I ought to say threaten) " That you would give me such a dressing as I never had in my life!" Whatever this elegant expression might mean, I neither know, nor am solicitous to enquire—mean what it would, you have not kept your promise, and I foresee you will not, for the best reason in the world—because you DARE not! About that I am stoically indifferent—I consider with perfect apathy and unconcern, all that Mr. Maxwell can say about me. And though I know the happy facility with which he can twist and warp the truth to his purposes, I am careless about that, so long as I know also, that, with all his art, he cannot torture it into falsity. Under the sanction of reason, truth, and common sense, the present Letter and a former trifle, about which you seem so mightily fore, bid defiance to all the SPLENDOUR of your VAST ABILITIES, either to deny the facts, or confute the inferences they contain. Secure in the respect and good opinion of my neighbours and countrymen; the character you are daily most illiberally attacking, is equally safe from the low efforts of your malice. I reflect, Sir, with pride and exultation, that that character is far beyond the reach of the envenomed shafts of your malvolence: I repeat, that I reflect upon it with pride; because, the pride of deserving a good character, and the luxury of enjoying one, are all the pride and luxury I ever felt, or aspired to.—Say the same WITH TRUTH if you can!—

I shall

I shall therefore pass over the more virulent parts of your scurrility at Spalding, as well as the gross calumnies you are pleased to honor me with in my absence. It would, indeed, be impolitic to distinguish them with any notice, as the poison never fails to bring the antidote with it; for they are never mentioned, without being reprobated with that pointed disapprobation they cannot fail to excite in the mind of every man of sense and liberality. Indeed, if it were otherwise, they would neither require nor deserve any other answer than what is contained in a single word, which I am almost as unwilling to use, as I should be to deserve. That word has so often been joined to your name, that they are almost become synonymous terms, and have long since lost their usual effect, both with yourself and the public. To prove this, I need only refer to sundry pamphlets by Mr. Hartley and others, to whom you addressed some of your *elegant and liberal epistles.*—

It is well known in how high and sublime a style you estimate the vast extent of your power as a Commissioner;—in your idea, it is without bounds.—That power is certainly too great, and you have on many occasions made us feel it is abundantly so.—Still however, it is to be hoped it is circumscribed by some limits; and, partial as you are to its supposed enormous magnitude, you will surely admit, that however great it may be, you derive it all from the Act that appoints you, and that you ought strictly to conform to its directions. Where, the Act is silent, you cannot have any power at all.—And *a fortiori*, in cases where the Act in pointed words,

words, expressly takes all power out of your hands; you cannot, in direct contradiction to it, create a power for yourself. The Fleet Inclosure Bill, in a clause which I shall copy in the margin*, expressly determines every thing with respect to the right of Tythes to the intended new allotments.—It tells you, in so many words, that such Tythes are to be paid to the **RECTOR OF FLEET.**—It does not leave, it did not *intend* to leave, to the Commissioners the shadow of any power to act in, determine upon, direct, advise, or even to think about the right or claim to such Tythes. It expressly deprives you of all such power, and positively takes it out of your hands.—Yet, in direct contradiction to this clause, mistaking your power in the first instance, and abusing it in the second, you was pleased, in a public Report upon the business, to insert a paragraph; and to add to it the pointed energy of a “*Nota Bene,*” containing your official; or, rather, I should say; your *officious* opinion; tending to shew, that the Tythes of part of the new allotments belonged to, and were claimable—not by me—not by the *Rector of Fleet*; but by gentlemen entirely unconnected with the Parish of Fleet, and who probably never heard of its very name.—The legislature of this Kingdom; King, Lords, and

“ * **And be it further Enacted,** That the said Common, Doves, and Waste Lands, when and so soon as the same shall be divided, allotted, and inclosed, under and by Virtue of this Act, shall be subject and liable to the same kind of Tythes, or customary payments in lieu thereof, due and payable to the said Rector of the said Parish of Fleet, as the Owners, Proprietors, and Occupiers of the old inclosed Lands in the said Parish, are now respectively liable to pay, set out, or satisfy to such Rector, for and in respect of such old inclosed Lands.”

Commons

Commons in Parliament assembled, had expressly enacted, that these Tythes are to be paid to the Rector of Fleet.—The superior authority of Mr. Maxwell's opinion says, that they may be claimed (and he clearly meant it as an invitation to them to do so) by gentlemen who cannot possibly have any right to them, but in his imagination.—

Perhaps it will be said, with a little astonishment, by some indignant readers, that an Act of Parliament is the clear and solemn law of the land.—But what has such a paltry authority as the law of the land to do, when put in competition with the opinion of so great a lawyer as Mr. Maxwell?—

To be serious, Sir;—If you had really possessed the power you assumed, the opinion was too contemptible even to be laughed at: and *not* possessing such a power, language does not contain words properly expressive of your conduct.—You well know that some of the gentlemen whom your extraordinary opinion (if it had been supported with a grain of reason, of law, or common sense) would have operated to serve, have pointedly reprobated an opinion so ridiculously preposterous, and smiled with contempt (as every sensible ingenuous man must do) at the folly—the absurdity—the impertinence of obtruding an opinion you was neither asked for, nor was even competent to the giving.—And which, if you had been competent to give, you ought to have been ashamed of giving.—

It has been asked, and there is some good sense in the enquiry, what could possibly occasion in Mr. Maxwell an enmity so inveterate against a man who never injured or offended him? — Those who have perused the *liberal and elegant letters* above alluded to, will not wonder at any degree of rancour in Mr. Maxwell, however unprovoked or unjustifiable. — But, in the present case, it is easily accounted for upon the principle of a general rule, which never had, and I believe never will have, a single exception. — I mean, that minds like Mr. Maxwell's never forgive those they have ill-treated. — And that Mr. Maxwell had treated me so ill, as to preclude the possibility of his forgiving me, I will hereafter shew by a variety of instances: — at present I shall confine myself to one more, which though it has formerly been mentioned, has not been fully explained.

At a meeting (November 15th, 1793) it was referred to you to make an estimate of what would be a fair equivalent for the tythes of Fleet, when the drainage and inclosure should be completed; and to make your report at a subsequent meeting. — To enable you to do so with the greater precision, I furnished you with every kind of information on the subject you could possibly have occasion for, as accurately as it lay in my power; and which the Parishioners, at a subsequent meeting, admitted to be perfectly correct; as, indeed, I well know it was. —

At a meeting (12th December, 1793) you made your Report; when your estimate was so far from being such a one as could be accepted; that I was then ready, and still

still am able to prove by the fairest deductions from indisputable postulata, that it fell short of HALF the probably improved value of the tythes, when the drainage and inclosure shall be completed.—

I may safely appeal to every gentleman present at that meeting, whether they ever saw a man more confused or perplexed than you was on this occasion?—With all your happy talents at reconciling contradictions, explaining away paradoxes, and making distinctions without any difference; so far from accounting for, or explaining, you had not a syllable to offer even to *palliate* a mistake of such a magnitude.—A proud man, who thinks himself, and wishes others to think him, infallible; betrayed by whatever means, into so enormous an error, was really entitled to pity.—As I had, at that time, no other reason to question your abilities, and none at all to doubt your integrity, I really did feel for you as much as you seemed to feel for yourself: and, as every body else was silent on the subject, I proposed, in order to dispose of the business in some mode, that you should reconsider the matter; that to enable you to do so with precision, you should take at least a cursory view of the lands in the Parish, and make your amended report at the next meeting.

This proposal you eagerly caught at, and readily acceded to.—But it is evident that you accepted it without any intention of performing it.—You well knew that no revision of the subject, nor any survey of the Parish, could rationally account for, or in any manner

justify so vast a deviation from the fact.—It therefore became necessary to stifle the business by some kind of subterfuge, however difficult it might be to find one.—What that subterfuge was, I am now to explain.—

Before the intended meeting I received a letter from you; which, though I have accidentally mislaid, I can state the contents of it as accurately as if it lay before me.—It began with saying “ That it had been suggested “ to you, that the Tythes payable to me, were very “ different from the state I had given of them.—“ That *strong evidence* of this, would be produced, from “ some *pleadings of my own:*” and it concluded with requesting fresh data, upon which to form the calculations.—

Surely it ought to have occurred to you, if your information was anonymous, that it deserved *no credit at all.*—And if you had it from a *voluntary informer*, that it deserved *JUST AS MUCH!*—You knew perfectly well (for you had heard it yourself) that the state I had given you of the tythes, had received, not only the tacit, but the *express* sanction of the parish, who were alone interested in it, and whose concern it was to detect error, if any error existed.—So far from it, they unanimously, and repeatedly, in your presence, admitted that my statement was perfectly right, and correct.—Yet all this was in a moment to be overturned, by the pretended dark suggestions of an anonymous, or at best a voluntary informer; if, in fact, you had *any informer at all:* and, upon information so questionable and suspicious,

picious, you very modestly called upon me to falsify, under my own hand, a statement given with all possible correctness, and which had publickly received the sanction of those who were interested in it.

In such a state of the matter, I submit it to the impartial, whether I did wrong in writing you the following letter: of which I give a literal copy, that they may determine whether it contains any thing improper.

C O P Y.

--o--

" To Mr. GEORGE MAXWELL.

" SIR,

" I am favored with your's of
 " yesterday's date; in answer to which, I can only say, that
 " I know of no such modus as that which you mention has been
 " suggested to you; nor of any thing else that can operate, in
 " any manner, to narrow my right to every species of Tythe
 " that can be claimed in this parish.—Much less can I
 " conceive what can be meant by evidence of such a matter
 " being produced from some " pleadings of my own:" as I
 " never had occasion, nor ever did institute any suit to establish
 " my claims; which never before were the subject of doubt,
 " and never at all the subject of litigation.—

" I can

" I can therefore only refer you to the short but pointed
 " state before sent of my claims (and which you will recollect,
 " were fully and expressly admitted by the gentlemen present at
 " the meeting) as the only data upon which calculations, if
 " any be made, must be formed. —

" But I am happy that your letter, and the suggestion
 " alluded to in it, furnish me with an opportunity of
 " requesting, that no further progress may be made in such
 " calculations.—I find the measure is so generally, I might
 " almost say universally, unpopular amongst my parishioners,
 " and is so little wished for by myself, who am perfectly
 " satisfied as I am; that any further step in the matter, I am
 " convinced, would be only a most useless waste of your and
 " Mr. Hare's time; and from the multiplicity and consequence
 " of your avocations, I am sure your time is much too valuable
 " both to the public, and yourselves, to be wasted without an
 " object in view.

" I therefore again request, as far as my request can avail,
 " that nothing more may be done in calculations as to the
 " tythes of Fleet; which were not at first taken up at my
 " requisition, and never had more than my consent (I might
 " indeed say my tacit consent) as I voted against the question
 " at the second meeting; and was far from wishing it to be
 " resumed at the last.

" I am, Sir,

" your most obedient

" humble Servant,

" JAMES ASHLEY.

" Fleet Rectory, December 22d, 1793."

It is necessary to follow this matter one step further, to the next meeting: (January 1, 1794.) There, Sir, your *nameless* suggestor, your *informer in nubibus*, did not dare to shew his respectable face, and support his dark suggestions; and all the satisfaction I could obtain as to those "*pleadings of my own;*" was, that if they had any meaning at all, they alluded to a suit commenced, and even concluded, long before I was *Rector of Fleet*; and even before I was in holy orders.—A suit to which I was neither party, attorney, or solicitor; and in the event of which, I had no interest.—Yet, with a degree of truth and consistency, which few will either envy, admire, or imitate, this was called "*pleadings of my own:*" and it was upon such "**STRONG EVIDENCE,**" to use your own words, that I was to be convicted of the black and heinous crime of endeavouring, by a false statement, to plunder, to rob, and injure, the inhabitants of a parish, with whom I have always lived in the most comfortable state of peace and content; of mutual harmony, and satisfaction.

You well know, if I were actuated by motives of personal enmity, I could trace this disgraceful business still further.—I shall decline doing so, unless future circumstances should make it necessary.—

I have now stated two instances of your unjustifiable ill-treatment (and may hereafter have occasion to detail many more) as unprovoked as they are unprecedented.—I call upon you, in this open and public manner, to controvert a single circumstance I have stated.—Confute them if you can!—Deny them if you dare!—

Oh—

Oh,—but it was said at Spalding, “ That my present opinion of you and your conduct, would be flatly contradicted by *my own hand writing!* ” — If this means ‘any thing, it can only mean that I once thought better of you than I do now.—I am far from denying or wishing to deny it.—The letter I have just copied above, is a proof of it; and, I imagine, is the very “ **HAND WRITING** ” so pompously alluded to.—It is true, like many others, I hastily took up an opinion of you warmly in your favour, which subsequent experience made me at my leisure coolly lay down again.—In this I am far from being singular; hundreds are under exactly the same predicament.—Is your vanity so consummate as to suppose that you are the only subject upon which it is not lawful for a man ever to alter his opinion; however erroneous he may find that opinion to be? Or however you may act to induce him to change it?—Or am I the only man that must not be allowed to think differently, *even of Mr. MAXWELL*; at very remote periods of time?—Instead of supposing that this implies a charge of inconsistency, let us state the plain fact.—In writing to you in the year 1793; I expressed myself *just as I THEN thought*:— three years afterwards, from the fullest and clearest conviction, I now do exactly the same thing!—

You seem to have in your keeping the opinions and sentiments of all the liberal minded men; for you confidently told me, “ That there was not one liberal minded man, but what condemned the publication that makes you so very angry.”—To abate a little the arrogance

arrogance that dictated this erroneous position, let me whisper in your ear, that, for that publication, I have received the *thanks* (by letter as well as *parole*) of very many of the most respectable, and liberal minded men in the country.—I have no objection to shewing you the letters, and giving you the names of such of them as are above the reach of your ill-employed power; at the same time, such of them as by any possibility may become liable to the *mild* effects of your FRIENDLY KINDNESSES, I will most cautiously shield from the TENDER MERCIES of such a man!—

What those TENDER MERCIES are, some very recent circumstances have sufficiently shewn; and given the inhabitants of this neighbourhood fresh cause to deplore the loss of that mild, humane, worthy man, Mr. Philip Ashley; and double cause to lament his being succeeded* by a man of a character so diametrically

* In an elegant publication of Mr. Maxwell's, which he is pleased to call "An Address to the Proprietors of the North Level;" though, in fact, it contains little more than the most scurrilous invectives against many very respectable characters:—In this *liberal composition*, which is dated from FLETTON, speaking of himself, his darling subject, he expresses himself in the following elegant, classical, and GRAMMATICAL manner.—“I here SOLEMNLY DECLARE, that NO TEMPTATION UPON EARTH, should ever induce me to quit the situation I am in, a situation peculiarly adapted to my convenience, my habits of life, the education of my children, my family connexions, and my regard for a few respectable acquaintance, amongst whom I was born,” &c.

Happy would it have been for this country, and richly would he have been entitled to the thanks of its inhabitants; if (forgetting old habits) he had suffered a little truth to have attached to this SOLEMN DECLARATION.—They would then never have known the bitter day that brought him to reside amongst them, nor felt all it's dire and baneful consequences, —But, alas!—even a SOLEMN DECLARATION could not secure a little truth and consistency from Mr. Maxwell.—

opposite, that nature seemed intent upon making a complete and perfect contrast.—Under his gentle, prudent, generous management, the landlord was respected, beloved, and almost adored, as his excellent character, and still more excellent heart, most richly deserved to be: and his tenants were easy, contented, and happy.—But (mark the sad reverse!) under your cruel, and oppressive conduct, the tenants are ***** * * ***** *** *** ***** ***** ***
*****. You may finish the sentence as well as you can for your own credit and honor.—Whether you do so or not, hundreds will supply the hiatus, in language perfectly consonant with their own feelings, and conviction.—Fast-falling times, and rents most rigorously raised, will soon enable this devoted country to estimate the extent of their obligations to Mr. Maxwell.—And, if the poor oppressed tenants *dare* speak their *real sentiments*, we should hear enough from them, who are so well able to distinguish between their amiable, humane, generous landlord, and his cruel, severe, unrelenting steward.

Has it never occurred to you, Sir, that you might as effectually have served your noble employer, and improved his estate, by doing your duty as a Commissioner of the South Holland Drainage?—With this difference, that instead of *oppressing* his tenants, you would have been promoting their interest at the same time.—
HAVE YOU DONE SO?—Is there a *liberal minded man* even of your own *description*?—Nay, is there a man of *any description*, who will be hardy enough to
say,

say, that you have discharged your duty, in an honest and conscientious manner, as a Commissioner in the South Holland Drainage and the Fleet Inclosure?— If there be such a man, let him stand forth, and avow himself!— Ask your own heart— Do YOU THINK so YOURSELF?— Will ANY OTHER MAN SAY so?—

I am, &c.

JAMES ASHLEY.

FLEET RECTORY.

October the 11th, 1796.

Postscript.

THE South Holland Drainage Act passed into a law in Ma 1793;—And what has yet been done?— May 1797, finds the work in a state far, very far, from being completed: and the FOURTH year after passing the Act will conclude, without seeing it further advanced. How indeed should it be otherwise? For I am told by many persons interested in it, who frequently view the works, and see with extreme regret the business standing still; that there is not now, nor has been for a long time, one man employed; though the seasons from the first have been, and the uncommonly dry state of the country now, is beyond expectation auspicious, and favorable for carrying on the works.

What can occasion such unexampled delays in a work of such moment, and consequence? and in which, compared with that consequence, there is so little to be done?

—I have heard it obliquely insinuated, that the delays are owing to the want of money.—As I do not know, and will not believe it possible, that the Commissioners themselves can have made use of such a pretence, I will not waste any time in shewing its futility: —It may not, however, be improper to state some circumstances that apply to the subject.—

In a pamphlet by Mr. Maxwell, dated June the 6th, 1791, speaking of the South Holland Drainage, he states, that "The lowlands (great part of which would be increased in annual value twelve, or even fifteen shillings an Acre) consist of about *Twenty-eight thousand Acres.*" — "The expense," he says, "would be a mere trifle, when compared with the advantage." — And he afterwards adds, "Upon the whole, it is presumed, that about *Ten Thousand Pounds* would pay the whole expense." —

And yet, let me ask, has there not been a Call made, not only upon these lands, but upon a large quantity of highlands also, for *twenty shillings per Acre*; if not to begin with, yet when the works were in a very early state of progression.

In a corrected estimate, in Mr. Maxwell's Report of August the 18th, 1792, in which every article is particularised, the whole expense (including £2,345 18s. 6d. for contingencies) is calculated at £17,985 8s. 6d. —

Has not money more than equal to the largest of these estimates been long since advanced by the Proprietors? — I am credibly informed there has. — If so, why are the works in a state, not only unfinished, but even suspended? —

I do not state the amount of the monies advanced, as a fact within my own knowledge: though from the authority from which I derive my information, I fully believe

believe it.—Should, however, that information happen not to be perfectly correct, I may venture to assert, that if the sums actually received on account of the intended works, were truly and fairly stated: so that their amount may be compared with the above estimates, and with the present state of the works, it would be extremely easy to form a pretty correct idea of the accuracy of ENGINEERING ESTIMATES: and the propriety and economy of the SUBSEQUENT EXPENDITURE!

J. A.

May the 10th, 1797.



Fleet Rectory, August 10th, 1797.

I FEEL myself entitled to say, and I am sure my neighbours and countrymen, the inhabitants of South Holland and its vicinity, will countenance me in saying, that I owe to my character, and situation in life, the declining to answer, or reply to *anonymous trash*.—

Mr. M. has thought proper to publish eighteen pages of falsehood and scurrility, which he intends should be considered as answering my letter to him.—But besides his old trick of *abusing* and *calling names*, he is pleased, though he writes in his own person, to adopt a *false signature*: because he was ashamed of putting even *his name* to such a farrago of falsehood and folly; or probably, because he knew I would not answer such trash, whilst it was anonymous, and he dare not sign such a string of untruths.—Could he be afraid of disgracing his *respectable name* by subscribing it?—Alas! that was a needless fear: for, surely a name so very much *respected*, so *beloved*, and so *ADORED* in Spalding and its neighbourhood, could not easily be disgraced by ANY THING!!—

With his usual consistency Mr. M. pretends to inveigh against anonymous scribblers, at the very moment that he is himself an anonymous scribbler, and is exercising the worst part of their abominable trade.—For, besides his feigned signature, the very correspondent he pretends to write to; his “*Dear Sir*,”—his “—————” “*Esquire*,” is without a name.—And though “*Esquire*,” is printed at full length, he cannot find a name, nor even the initials of a name for this ‘*Squire BLANK in the clouds!*’—

And

And yet, in a scrawl so completely anonymous, he rails at anonymous writers; and falsely, *basely*, and IMPUDENTLY charges me with an anonymous letter I did not write, and consequently am not answerable for.

I always have, and always will treat Mr. M. with that fairness and openness that never shall depart from my character and conduct.—Whatever he writes, and *subscribes his name to*, shall always meet with proper notice.—And even the *wretched ribaldry* he has just published, if he will address it to me in a fair, open, and proper manner; and sign his name to it; I pledge myself to the public, that I will then shew, to their satisfaction, that beside the nicknames and scurrility; every page, every paragraph, and almost every line of it is replete with *false facts—false inferences—false statements—false reasonings—false quotations—false charges—false EVERY THING*.—I will then take it paragraph by paragraph, detect every falsehood it contains, and expose the miserable sophistry that envelopes them.—But 'till then, I again say, I will not answer, or condescend to notice further, any more anonymous trash; or any other trash that is not addressed to me by a name that, I thank God, I never had any just cause to be ashamed of; and which shall always be subscribed to whatever I publish, of a nature that I ought to be responsible for.—

In the mean time, I earnestly wish that every person who has honored with their perusal my letter to Mr. M. would also peruse his present most extraordinary squib; and then determine impartially, whether it can truly or fairly be said to amount *even to an attempt* at answering the material parts of my Letter.



JAMES ASHLEY.

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